

## Backup Failed In 911 Outage

Root of Disruption  
Under Investigation  
In Montgomery

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Montgomery County dispatchers were unable to answer some 911 calls during a three-hour period Sunday as a result of a phone service outage and a malfunction that prevented a backup system from operating properly, Verizon Communications and county officials said yesterday.

The disruption in 911 service lasted from about 10:40 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Verizon spokesman Harry J. Mitchell said. County officials said they do not know how many calls went unanswered.

Equipment that routes calls to a secondary system during an outage did not work properly, Mitchell said. County and Verizon officials are trying to determine the cause of the outage as well as the cause of the equipment malfunction.

The emergency communication center, which handles police and fire calls, is run by the county police department. Lt. Paul Starks, a police spokesman, said last night that no one notified the police department to say they were unable to get through to dispatchers during the outage.

"The good part about this is it was Sunday midday, which is normally not a high-volume call time," he said. "The weather wasn't bad, either."

But that was of no help to Pascale Queffelec, a Bethesda resident who said it took her nearly 10 minutes to notify firefighters about a fire in her attic.

Queffelec smelled smoke coming from the attic of her two-

CONT.

## Backup System Wasn't Working During Outage

story red-brick house in the 4500 block of Sleaford Road shortly before 1 p.m.

She ran out with her 7-year-old daughter and the family's cat and two dogs with a cordless phone in hand. Queffelec, 42, said she dialed 911 numerous times.

"Nobody was answering the phone," she said yesterday. "I was hysterical."

Queffelec stopped some motorists and asked them to call 911. Two of them tried but were unable to get through, she said.

"I was flipping out," she said. "I didn't know what to do."

Ultimately, one of the drivers found a phone number for the fire department.

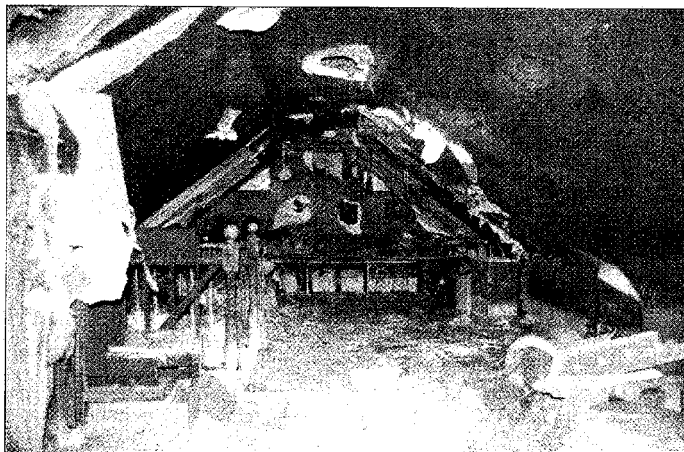
Firefighters were able to put out the blaze before it spread to other parts of the house, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service spokesman Pete Piringer said. The fire caused about \$75,000 in damage, he said. Investigators believe it was caused by an extension cord that was overloaded with a space heater and Christmas lights, Piringer said.

The attic, which was recently renovated and featured on Home & Garden Television, was a playroom for Queffelec's two daughters.

The 911 center experienced an outage in September, but the backup system worked smoothly until the outage was repaired.

Montgomery County Council member Phil Andrews (D-Gaithersburg-Rockville), who chairs the council's public safety committee, said yesterday that he was concerned about the phone problems at the emergency communications center. He said county officials intend to create a mechanism that alerts dispatchers when calls aren't coming through. Currently, 911 center personnel notice that the system is down when they stop receiving calls for an extended period.

"It's very serious because of the importance of the need for people to get through to the emergency operations center," he said. "It's a high priority that the county figure out how to avoid this."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WRT CHANNEL 8

**Pascale Queffelec of Bethesda said it took her nearly 10 minutes to notify firefighters about a blaze in her attic, which she noticed near the end of the 911 outage. After she and others made several calls to 911, a passing motorist found a phone number for the fire department. The blaze caused about \$75,000 in damage but was subdued before it could spread to other parts of the house, a fire spokesman said.**

